

The Verification Monster

EVER SINCE THE Senate Intelligence Committee's report on the new strategic arms treaty started coming into public view last week, a little minuet has been danced over the distinction between verifying and monitoring. Whether SALT II can be "adequately verified," in the commonly accepted yardstick, is ultimately a subjective question touching matters of confidence and intent as well as cameras in the sky, and one on which serious people may differ. But the questions of whether and how the treaty's controls can be monitored can be answered with some objectivity by people with respect for evidence.

So it is that some (but not all) of those who find flaws in SALT for other reasons have taken a certain comfort from noting that the Intelligence Committee does not pronounce on verification. It does not even mention the word. Pro-SALT people, meanwhile, have saluted the committee's unanimous findings that the treaty strengthens the American ability to monitor Soviet weapons under the treaty's controls and that without SALT II the Soviets could freely practice concealment and deception and make monitoring of the same forces more difficult still.

The tone of debate about the new report and indeed the progress of the whole treaty debate indicate

that verification has been all but washed out as an issue on which final judgment of the treaty will be based. Even before this report came out, it was evident that opponents of the treaty did not wish to rest their case on this issue; none really has. The country, as well as the Senate, has been undergoing a certain education, in which the new report plays its part. Its main point is that we will be able to see more under the treaty's terms than we can see without it.

The altered understanding of the issue is evident on at least three levels. Awareness has grown of the sophistication of the United States' technical means of monitoring Soviet programs. There is an awareness—the furor over Soviet troops in Cuba has helped here—of the need for improved analytic capability in the processing of intelligence and for political vigilance in overseeing collection and analysis. And a broad sense has developed of the pickle the United States would be in if, by rejecting the treaty, it licensed unrestrained Soviet concealment and deception in a strategic context newly inflamed by the rejection of the treaty.

This is not to say that, because the verification issue no longer looks like the monster it once did, the Senate has no further reason to look hard at SALT. But the monster has been, if not slain, then tamed.